



# Saint Josemaría Escrivá

## Founder of Opus Dei

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## Detailed chronology of the Cause of the Canonization of St Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

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The Cause of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, Founder of Opus Dei, concluded on October 6, 2002 when His Holiness Pope John Paul II canonized him in a solemn ceremony. The following account tracks the main steps in this canonical process, through official documents alone.

### 1) Preparation

**February 2, 1978** is the date on the first document in the Cause of the canonization of the Founder of Opus Dei. This was the appointment of the Postulator, Mgr Flavio Capucci. The document was signed by Mgr Alvaro del Portillo, then President General of Opus Dei (\*); it received the *Nihil Obstat*, or approval, of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints on **February 7, 1978**. The short rescript from the Congregation was signed by the Secretary, H. E. Mgr Giuseppe Casoria, and by the Promoter General of the Faith, Fr Gaetano Stano OFM Conv., and in it Mgr Escrivá de Balaguer was first given the title “Servant of God”.

The appointment of the Postulator did not mean the Cause had been opened; it meant that the initiators of the Cause (in this case, the President General of Opus Dei together with his Committees) considered that it would be opportune to ask the competent Church authorities for the Cause to be opened in due course. For this purpose, they decided on the person who, as Postulator, would be in charge of promoting and following the different stages of the Cause. The indispensable first step was to show the existence of a widespread reputation for holiness and the current relevance, the benefit to the Church, of the Cause. Therefore the Postulator’s first task was to gather documentation on these two subjects.

**February 14, 1980** Cardinal Ugo Poletti was the Vicar of the Pope for the diocese of Rome where the Servant of God had died. The Postulator sent him the *Supplex*

*Libellus*, i.e. the formal petition for the Cause to be opened. With it he sent a number of volumes, some showing the depth and extent of the Founder's reputation for holiness, and some demonstrating the great interest of a large number of pastors and faithful of the People of God in the cause. These volumes were as follows:

- one volume of testimonies from Spanish ecclesiastics who had known the Founder for many years of his life, and witnessed to the virtues which they had seen in him;

- two volumes containing a sample, numbering a few hundred, out of the thousands of postulatory letters that had been received from Church dignitaries (69 cardinals, 241 archbishops, 987 bishops, and 41 superiors-general of religious orders and congregations), civil dignitaries (heads of state or heads of governments, and notable figures from the spheres of education and science), and people from every walk of life and from all five continents, including a number of non-Catholics, asking for the Cause to be opened. Two particularly significant letters were the one dated **March 23, 1976**, written by Cardinal Luciani, then Patriarch of Venice and soon to be Pope John Paul I, and the one dated **April 13, 1978** from the Episcopal Conference of Latium;

- two 800-page volumes of testimonies on Mgr Escrivá's reputation for holiness during his life and after his death;

- a 672-page volume giving 1,500 of the nearly 10,000 letters that had been received between the day Mgr Escrivá died and December 1978 when the volume was compiled, telling about spiritual and material favors attributed to his intercession. (From that point until the present, the Postulation has received something like 120,000 accounts of favors, including complete documentation on 48 extraordinary cures.)

Together with the *Supplex Libellus* were what is known as the "Articles of the Postulator": this was a systematic account of the life and virtues of the Servant of God, covering about 450 pages. It set out the thesis which the Postulation aimed to demonstrate in the course of the official investigation.

**March 15, 1980** Cardinal Poletti asked the Pope for his permission for the Cause of the Founder of Opus Dei to be formally opened, asserting his conviction "in conscience, of its remarkable relevance to the Church".

**February 5, 1981** Pope John Paul II confirmed the decision of the ordinary

Congress of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints (**January 30, 1981**), which had been taken after they had received the *Nihil Obstat* from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and he authorized the Cardinal Vicar to decree the introduction of the Cause.

## 2) *Hearings on his life and virtues*

**February 19, 1981** Cardinal Poletti published the decree introducing the Cause. It was 5 years and 8 months since the Servant of God had died; the Congregation's rules (Chapter II, Article 5, no. 4) laid down that not less than 5 years should pass before the introduction of a Cause. The decree now published fixed the opening session of the hearing for **May 12** that year. Some days before that date, Cardinal Poletti signed the decree appointing the members of the tribunal.

**February 26, 1981** The Postulator appointed the Rev. Dr. Benito Badrinas Amat as Vice-Postulator for Spain. On **March 26** this appointment was ratified by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints.

March 12, 1981 In view of the fact that 80% of the witnesses whom he wished to summon before the tribunal were Spanish speakers, the Postulator asked the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints to authorize the setting-up of a parallel, autonomous tribunal in the archdiocesan curia of Madrid. The Congregation approved this on March 14 in a document in which, for the first time, the Cause was called "*Romana et Matriten.*" (Roman and Madrid), meaning that there were two hearings of equal importance.

**March 28, 1981** In accordance with the rules then in force, the Congregation sent to Cardinal Poletti and Cardinal Enrique y Tarancon, Archbishop of Madrid, the questions to be put to the witnesses and the instructions which the tribunals were to follow.

**May 13, 1981** The Vicepostulator asked the Archbishop to open the hearings. On **May 16** Cardinal Enrique y Tarancon decreed the opening of the hearings, appointed the members of the tribunal and convoked the first session for **May 18**.

The first session of the Roman hearings was held on **May 12, 1981** and the last on **November 6, 1986**: they covered five and half years, with 374 sessions (between the two sets of hearings there was a total of 980 sessions). Twenty-six witnesses were interviewed: three cardinals, two archbishops, one bishop, eleven priests and nine lay-people (including three people who had been in Opus Dei and subsequently left).

The most significant points of the Roman hearings were:

- **October 13, 1981** Publication of the edict of the Cardinal Vicar requiring the writings of the Servant of God to be collected together (a similar document was published in Madrid on **December 3, 1981**);
- **May 10, 1982** Authorization for Mgr Alvaro del Portillo to be called as a witness, although he had been the confessor of the Servant of God for forty years. The need for due discretion was underlined, and he was advised not to refer to the internal sphere in his replies. Mgr del Portillo observed these recommendations scrupulously throughout his testimony (Prot. No. 1339-18/982);
- **July 20, 1982** Authorization for some witnesses to respond to the questions in writing (Prot. No. 1339-22/982);
- **January 25, 1983** Pope John Paul II promulgated the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, which reformed the proceedings of the Causes of Saints. The norms for applying it were issued on **February 7**. The new rules laid it down that before a Cause is introduced the competent local bishop should order a theological examination of the published writings of the Servant of God. The tribunal interpreted this norm rigorously and decided that although the Cause had already been introduced, a theological study of Mgr Escrivá's works could shed further light on his spiritual personality. Accordingly, on **May 9, 1983** the tribunal appointed two theological censors, who submitted their reports a year later. Shortly afterwards the tribunal appointed two more censors for Mgr Escrivá's unpublished works, and these completed their task in **October 1986**.

The acts of the hearings were collected in twenty-seven volumes, fourteen of which (seven thousand pages in all) gave the witnesses' testimonies; the rest were documents and writings of the Servant of God.

The hearings in Madrid were held between **May 18, 1981** and **June 26, 1984**, with a total of 606 sessions, each of which was attended by all five members of the tribunal. Sixty witnesses were heard: two archbishops, six bishops, seventeen priests, five religious and thirty lay-people (including eight people who had been in Opus Dei and had subsequently left). Most of the witnesses were not people of Opus Dei. In the years covered by the hearings a new archbishop of Madrid, Cardinal Angel Suquia, was appointed. He was sworn in as president of the tribunal on **June 11, 1983**, and confirmed all its members in their appointments.

The Congregation granted the Madrid tribunal, among other things, the right to

exclude a witness who was on the list proposed by the Postulation but was considered unsuitable (Prot. no. 1339-28/984, dated **February 10, 1984**).

The acts of the Madrid hearings filled 11 volumes, or about 4,500 pages in all. They were deposited with the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints on **June 28, 1984** and remained there, sealed, until the conclusion of the Rome hearings.

### 3) Study phase

**November 10, 1986** The Congregation for the Causes of the Saints decreed the opening of the acts of both hearings.

**January 13, 1987** The Congregation appointed Fr Ambrose Eszer, O.P., as Relator for the Cause of the Founder of Opus Dei.

**April 3, 1987** The Congregation concluded its study of how the rules and guidelines then in force had been adhered to in the course of the hearings, and pronounced them valid.

Immediately after this the Congregation provided the Postulator with an authenticated copy of the Acts so that he could draw up the "*Positio super vita et virtutibus*" ("statement about the life and virtues") under the guidance of the Relator, whose duty it would be to check and approve of whatever the Postulator wrote.

June 1988 The Postulator gave the Congregation the "*Positio super vita et virtutibus*", i.e. a systematic account of the proofs of the holiness of the Servant of God as demonstrated by the witnesses' testimonies and the historical documents which had been gathered in the course of the investigation from 390 public and private sources.

The "*Positio*" took up four volumes and totalled 6,000 pages. It consisted of:

- the *Informatio*, giving the history of the Cause, a presentation and evaluation of sources, a study of the Servant of God's reputation for holiness and its basis, and the decisions of the censors;

- the *Summarium* or summary, which consisted of those testimonies and documents which were considered of greatest importance by the Postulation both for and against the Cause, presented without any comments, so that the Consultors could form their own judgement independent of the Postulator's explanations;

- the *Biographia documentata* or documented biography, which was a rigorous historico-critical reconstruction of the Servant of God's life in which each statement was supported by carefully documented sources, and the sources were critically rated to enable their reliability to be evaluated;

- the *Studium criticum super heroicitate virtutum* or critical study on the heroic nature of the virtues, which applied scientific method to the examination of the Servant of God's theological and moral virtues, in order to determine whether he practiced them to a heroic degree.

**September 19, 1989** After a year and a half of study, the Theological Consultors appointed by the Promoter General of the Faith met for a vote in Congress. There was a 7 to 1 vote in favor.

**March 20, 1990** A plenary meeting was held of the cardinals and bishops of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. The purpose of the meeting was to determine the heroic nature of Mgr Escrivá's virtues. Cardinal Edouard Gagnon acted as Speaker (appointed **November 10, 1989**: Prot. no. 1339-48/89). The meeting voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

**April 9, 1990** The Holy Father accepted and ratified this decision. The Decree *super heroicitate virtutum* (on the heroic character of his virtues) was read in his presence. The Servant of God received the title "Venerable". This concluded the first step towards canonization.

#### 4) *Towards Beatification*

The miracle which was chosen for the beatification of Venerable Josemaría Escrivá had been worked in June 1976, a year after his death. It was the instantaneous, complete and permanent cure of Sister Concepcion Boullon Rubio, a 70-year-old Carmelite Sister of Charity, who had been suffering from an illness diagnosed by the Medical Consultants of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints as "tumoral lipocalcinogranulomatosis in a white Caucasian subject, in multiple locations, painful and invalidating, the largest being a lump the size of an orange on the left shoulder; plus cachexia (general wasting) with a gastric ulcer and a hiatus hernia complicated by severe hypochromic anemia." No medical treatment had been applied. It was not the sick woman herself who prayed to the Founder of Opus Dei for her cure, but her sisters, living in Teruel, Spain.

The cure had taken place in the Convent of San Lorenzo del Escorial. The competent local bishop was therefore the Archbishop of Madrid, Cardinal Vicente

Enrique y Tarancon. The steps taken in the canonical investigation were as follows.

**September 18, 1981** The Vicepostulator, Rev. Benito Badrinas, gave the Archbishop a complete report of the cure with a petition for the investigation to be opened by the Madrid curia.

**October 1, 1981** The Archbishop of Madrid asked the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints for the *Nihil Obstat* to set up the relevant hearings *super miro* (concerning the miracle).

**November 6, 1981** Rescript from the Congregation authorizing the hearings to be held.

**November 14, 1981** The Congregation sent the instructions and questions for the hearings to the Madrid tribunal.

**December 12, 1981** The Vicepostulator sent the *Supplex Libellus*, the Articles of the Postulator, and the list of witnesses he proposed to call, to the Archbishop of Madrid, requesting the commencement of the hearings.

**December 18, 1981** Cardinal Vicente y Tarancon signed a decree appointing the members of the Tribunal and fixed the first session of the hearings for **January 21, 1982**.

**April 3, 1982** The hearings concluded after 19 sessions.

**April 5, 1982** The acts of the tribunal were deposited with the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, where they would remain sealed until the decree on the heroic nature of Mgr Escrivá's virtues had been published. According to the rules, the alleged miracle cannot be investigated before this point. However, the hearings may be held, *ne pereant probationes* (lest the proofs should be lost), simultaneously with the study of the virtues, since these hearings do not constitute any judgment but are simply a means of gathering the proofs for judgment to be given in the future.

**July 9, 1982** The Congregation authorized the commencement of the hearings.

**November 30, 1984** The Congregation for the Causes of the Saints decreed the formal validity of the hearings, without thereby embarking on a study of their object.

**June 30, 1990** Three months after the promulgation of the decree *super virtutibus* (on the virtues), the Medical Consultants of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints held a meeting and agreed unanimously that the cure of Sister Concepcion Boullon Rubio had no scientific explanation.

**July 14, 1990** The Congress of Theological Consultors concluded, also unanimously, that this scientifically inexplicable cure should be attributed to the intercession of the Venerable Josemaría Escrivá.

**June 18, 1991** The Ordinary Congregation of Cardinals and Bishops confirmed the decisions of the doctors and theologians.

July 6, 1991 The decree *super miro* was promulgated in the presence of the Holy Father.

**October 3, 1991** Cardinal Angelo Felici, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, published the date of the beatification.

**May 17, 1992** In St Peter's Square, Pope John Paul II solemnly beatified Josemaría Escrivá and Josephina Bakhita, a Canossian religious sister born in Sudan. On the following day, the Holy Father told a crowd of the faithful who had come to an audience in St Peter's Square: "You are filled with joy by the beatification of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, because you are confident that his being raised to the altars will bring much good to the Church. I too share that confidence."

##### *5) Towards canonization*

The miracle which led to Blessed Josemaría's canonization was worked in **November 1992**. This was the cure of an illness defined by the Medical Consultants of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints as "cancerization of chronic third-phase irreversible radiodermatitis".

The subject of this case was Dr Manuel Nevado Rey, a sixty-year-old traumatologist, who lived in Almendralejo, Badajoz, Spain. After working as a surgeon for many years with frequent exposure to X-rays, he contracted this disease, which was an occupational hazard for people of his profession. By the end of 1992 it had reached an extremely serious stage. In November he met one of the faithful of the Prelature who gave him a prayer-card with a prayer to Blessed (as he then was) Josemaría Escrivá, and suggested that he could pray to

him for a cure. Dr Nevado did so, and within a fortnight his hands looked absolutely normal again, without his having undergone any kind of treatment.

This cure was an extraordinary one, since international medical literature reports no cases of radiodermatitis which has disappeared or regressed spontaneously. The hearings to take evidence for the cure were held in the Episcopal curia of Badajoz. The main steps in the process were the following:

**December 30, 1993** The Postulator sent the *Supplex Libellus* to the bishop of Badajoz for him to grant the opening of the hearings *super miro*.

**March 11, 1994** A vice-postulator was appointed.

**April 30, 1994** On behalf of the bishop, the judiciary vicar for the diocese of Badajoz wrote to the Professor of Medical Pathology at the University of Badajoz requesting an expert opinion in advance of the hearings. He promptly received an answer in the affirmative.

**May 9, 1994** The bishop appointed the members of the tribunal and convoked the first session for May 12.

The hearings closed on **July 4, 1994** after 21 sessions.

**July 7, 1994** The acts of the tribunal were deposited with the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints.

**January 26, 1996** The Congregation proceeded to open the acts of the tribunal.

**March 7, 1996** The Postulator requested a study of the validity of the hearings.

**April 26, 1996** The Congregation decreed that the hearings were valid.

**July 10, 1997** The Medical Consultants held a meeting at which they declared unanimously that the cure was scientifically inexplicable.

**January 9, 1998** The Congress of Theological Consultors agreed unanimously that the cure could only be attributed to the intercession of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá.

**August 3, 2001** The Congregation for the Causes of the Saints appointed Cardinal Pio Larghi as Speaker for the plenary session to discuss Dr Nevado's

cure.

**September 21, 2001** Having considered the conclusions reached by the medical and theological consultants, the plenary congregation of cardinals also voted unanimously in favor of the miraculous nature of the cure.

**December 20, 2001** The decree *super miro* was promulgated in the presence of the Holy Father.

**February 26, 2002** At an Ordinary Public Consistory the Pope announced the canonization of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Priest, Founder of Opus Dei, for **October 6, 2002**.

**October 6, 2002** Josemaría Escrivá was canonized in St Peter's Square, Rome, before a huge crowd of the faithful from 94 countries. Over 50 cardinals were present at the ceremony, as were more than 500 bishops. On the following day at an audience for those who had come for the canonization, the Pope defined St Josemaría as "the saint of the ordinary", a man "really convinced that, for whoever lives with an outlook of faith, everything offers an opportunity for a meeting with God, everything becomes a stimulus for prayer." The Pope underlined St Josemaría's service of everyone, particularly "plain to see in the magnanimity with which he pushed ahead so many works of evangelization and of human development to help the poorest." He wound up by inviting his listeners to imitate St Josemaría's example of love for the Church.

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(\*) When Opus Dei was established as a Personal Prelature on November 28, 1982, Mgr Alvaro del Portillo was appointed its Prelate.